DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 933 CG 019 713

AUTHOR Boyd, Vivian; And Others
TITLE Diagnostic and Prescriptive Interviews with Second Semester Freshmen in Academic Jeopardy.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
REPORT NO RR-7-86
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Academic Persistence; *College Students; *Educational Diagnosis; *Grade Point Average; Higher Education; Improvement Programs; *School Counseling; Student Evaluation; *Student Improvement; *Underachievement

ABSTRACT

In Spring 1983, 124 second semester freshmen at the University of Maryland at College Park whose first semester grade point averages were below minimum requirements for graduation participated in a diagnostic and prescriptive interview program. Participants met with a counseling center staff person to help students first to identify the causes of their poor grades and then to determine which campus resources could be useful to them in preventing similar low achievement from recurring. Students (N=25) who completed an initial interview but did not show for their diagnostic interview were combined with single diagnostic interview students (N=62) for purposes of analysis. Thirty-seven students completed two diagnostic interviews. Students participating in the program were found to persist at somewhat higher rates in subsequent semesters and to do better academically than a comparison group of students (N=50) not participating in the program, although the difference was not statistically significant. These differences were sustained for four semesters after the semester of intervention. These findings encourage further investigation of diagnostic and prescriptive interviews as a method of improving both retention and academic performance of students in academic jeopardy. (Author/NB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED2789933

# COUNSELING CENTER

## Office of Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

### UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

College Park, Maryland

# DIAGNOSTIC AND PRESCRIPTIVE INTERVIEWS WITH SECOND SEMESTER FRESHMEN IN ACADEMIC JEOPARDY

Research Report # 7 - 86

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Brian McLaren, Thomas Magoon.

CG 019713

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

W. Sedlacek

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

COUNSELING CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

# DIAGNOSTIC AND PRESCRIPTIVE INTERVIEWS WITH SECOND SEMESTER FRESHMEN IN ACADEMIC JEOPARDY

Research Report # 7 - 86

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Brian McLaren, Thomas Magoon.

# Diagnostic and Prescriptive Interviews with Second Semester Freshmen in Academic Jeopardy

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*
University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland

Research Report # 7 - 86

Summary

In Spring semester 1983, 124 second semester freshmen whose first semester grade point average was below minimum requirements for graduation participated in a diagnostic and prescriptive interview program. By means of one or two individual sessions with a Counseling Center staff person this program aimed to help students first to identify the causes of their poor grades and then to determine which campus resources could be useful to them in preventing similar low achievement from recurring. Students participating in the program were found to persist at somewhat higher rates in subsequent semesters and to do better academically than a comparison group of students not participating in the program, although the difference was not statistically significant. These differences were sustained for four semesters after the semester of intervention. Results encourage further investigation of diagnostic and prescriptive interviews as a method of improving both retention and academic performance of students in academic jeopardy.

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Brian McLaren, Thomas Magoon.

# Diagnostic and Prescriptive Interviews with Second Semester Freshmen in Academic Jeopardy

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*
University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland

It is generally agreed that once a college or university admits a student into its degree program, responsibility is placed both on the institution to provide support services that will enable the student to achieve his/her educational goals, and on the student to take advantage of the resources the institution has to offer. However, many students in academic jeopardy fail to avail themselves of resources provided for them by the university (Romano & Young, 1981).

In the interest of retention, a growing number of colleges and universities have taken an increasingly proactive stance and contacted academically at-risk students to offer them specific services (Glennon, 1976; Himelstein & Himelstein, 1977; Hudesman, Avramides, Loveday, Waber, & Wendell, 1983; Landward & Hepworth, 1984; Letchworth & Bleidt, 1983; Romano & Young, 1981; Tata, 1981; Tricomi, Donaruma, Dugan, & Cuevas, 1982). Glennon, for example, found that when freshmen and new transfer students receiving low midterm grades were individually invited to see their counselors, 74% of the students who saw their counselors had earned passing grades at the conclusion of the first year of operation. Furthermore, this

*Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Brian McLaren, Thomas Magoon.

intrusive counseling program reduced freshman attrition from 45% to 6% during the first two years of operation.

Other similar studies, however, have not duplicated the results of Glennon's research. Indeed, what seems more typical is a short-lived effect, where GPAs increase during the semester of intervention for experimentals as compared with nontreatment controls, but return to institutional baselines within a year after the intervention (Dukes & Gaither, 1984; Landward & Hepworth, 1984).

An important variable to consider when planning a proactive intervention is the total time commitment expected of the participating student. Although GPA improvement has been shown to be related to the degree of student commitment to the requirements of the intervention, commitment tends to decrease as the length of time required by the intervention increases (Himelstein & Himelstein, 1977; Romano & Young, 1981). It is important, then, to ensure that the time commitment of participants is sufficient for effects to occur yet not so long as to be burdensome.

Data indicate that students in academic jeopardy respond to structure and clearly defined expectations (Hudesman et al., 1983; Tricomi, 1982; Warman, 1983). Warman, for example, found that freshmen whose first term GPA was lower than the minimum needed for graduation benefitted from a single interview conducted early in the second semester. The purposes of this interview were to identify the cause(s) of the student's low grades and to inform the student of campus resources useful in

preventing similar low achievement from recurring. When compared with nontreatment controls, students in the experimental group increased their second semester GPA and were more likely to return for their third semester.

Replication of the Warman study was undertaken with one alteration by the Counseling Center at The University of Maryland College Park. Of the students given the diagnostic and prescriptive interview, half were asked by their interviewer to return for a second interview four weeks later for the purpose of determining their progress in using the recommended campus resources.

## METHOD

In Spring semester 1983, a random list was generated of 900 full time second semester freshmen whose first semester GPA was less than 2.00, the minimum needed to graduate from the University of Maryland. From that list the names of students participating in other retention studies were deleted, and those with no local address and/or local phone number were also dropped.

A nontreatment comparison group was selected by taking every 18th name (n=50). Every third remaining name (n=255) was sent a letter from the campus Undergraduate Dean. The letter expressed disappointment and concern regarding that student's academic performance, and recommended consultation with an advisor or faculty member. The letter also served to alert the student that a Counseling Center staff member might call to arrange an interview time as part of a program designed to help students with low grade point averages to figure out why their grades had

been low and how to prevent such grades in the future.

A major incentive for participating, intensified by the letter with the Undergraduate Dean's encouragement to participate, was, presumably, the opportunity to improve their grades and thus their chances of graduating. It was hoped that at least half of the 255 students to whom the letter was sent would agree to come in for the interview and that half of those would also come in for the second, followup interview. As expected, one out of every two students contacted by telephone agreed to come in for a first interview.

The Initial Interview

At the beginning of the interview session, students completed a problem checklist, developed by Warman for the Iowa State study and modified slightly for this study. The checklist asked the students to indicate the causes of their low grades, and then to circle those causes they considered to be the major ones. Next, using a campus Resource Manual prepared for this study and indexed to parallel the checklist problems with corresponding specific helping programs, the counselor helped the students to pinpoint which campus resources would be appropriate for each student's particular problems. Last, students were encouraged to contact the agencies that sponsored the programs and services identified during the interview.

Outcome Variables

There were three outcome variables studied to determine the effect of the intervention on subject retention rates:

(1) academic persistence, defined as registered for and

completed a given semester;

(2) persistence in good standing, defined as registered for and completed a given semester and with no University academic action taken as a result of that semester;

(3) semester grade point average, as determined by the University three weeks after the end of a given semester.

All data concerning registration status, academic action, and grade point average, were obtained from University records.

## RESULTS

Of the 255 students who received the Undergraduate Dean's letter, 190 were also contacted by phone. Of these, 124 (65%) received at least the initial interview: 62 were scheduled for and completed a single diagnostic and prescriptive interview; 37 were scheduled for and completed two interviews. Twenty-five students completed the initial interview but "no-showed" for their scheduled followup interview. These students were combined with the single interview group for the purpose of analysis.

Table 1 shows academic persistence rates by group. Academic persistence for both the two interview group and the one interview group was higher than for the comparison group, with the higher rates associated with more interview exposure. These effects persisted for four semesters following the intervention. Although the differences in persistence rates are in the expected direction, none reached statistical significance ($p < .05$), using chi square.

Table 1. Academic Persistence Rates by Group

| Semester | GROUP: Two Interviews n=37 | % | One Interview n=87 | % | Comparison n=50 | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fall '83 | 27 | 73 | 60 | 69 | 33 | 66 |
| Spring '84 | 24 | 65 | 52 | 60 | 27 | 54 |
| Fall '84 | 21 | 57 | 45 | 52 | 24 | 48 |
| Spring '85 | 21 | 57 | 43 | 49 | 24 | 48 |

Table 2 shows rates of students who persisted in good standing, by group. The rates on this variable for both the two interview and the single interview groups were higher than for the comparison group. As with the academic persistence rates, the differences in rates of those who were registered and in good standing were in the anticipated direction although none reached statistical significance, using chi square.

Table 2. 'Persisted and in Good Standing' Rates by Group

| Semester | GROUP: Two Interviews n | % | One Interview n | % | Comparison n | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fall '83 | 19 | 51 | 37 | 43 | 20 | 40 |
| Spring '84 | 15 | 41 | 39 | 45 | 20 | 40 |
| Fall '84 | 19 | 51 | 37 | 43 | 18 | 36 |
| Spring '85 | 20 | 54 | 36 | 41 | 20 | 40 |

Table 3 shows semester grade point average by group. An analysis of variance revealed that the groups did not significantly differ on this variable, yet the students receiving two interviews outperformed students in the no-treatment comparison group in each of the four semesters subsequent to the intervention.

Table 3. Grade Point Average by Group

| Semester | GROUP | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Two Interviews | | One Interview | | Comparison | |
| | M | S.D. | M | S.D. | M | S.D. |
| Fall '83 | 2.17 | .72 | 2.08 | .73 | 1.87 | .91 |
| Spring '84 | 2.29 | .96 | 2.13 | .72 | 2.23 | .79 |
| Fall '84 | 2.56 | .70 | 2.19 | .76 | 2.19 | .81 |
| Spring '85 | 2.57 | .60 | 2.20 | .81 | 2.32 | .61 |

## DISCUSSION

As can be seen in the Warman (1983) study, there is some indication that freshmen in academic jeopardy who agree to participate in an interview during which they are given specific information concerning campus resources to help them cope with their self-identified problem areas tend to persist at higher rates and tend to do better academically than students not receiving such treatment. Although statistical significance at the .05 level was not reached, a consistent trend in the expected direction exists and is of institutional importance.

Unlike previous studies, differences in academic persistence and in academic performance between the treatment groups and the nontreatment comparison group, although not statistically significant, are sustained for four semesters after the semester

of intervention. Further research is needed in which either (a) incentives for student participation are effective in eliciting the involvement of a large percentage of targeted students, or (b) the comparison group is constituted from among those students agreeing to participate. Then it would be possible to attribute differential effects to the treatment itself rather than suspecting interference from variables such as student motivation or compliance.

The diagnostic and prescriptive interview is an intervention that is personal and focuses on each student's specific problem pattern and appropriate remedial steps. It makes use of already established campus programs and resources, has high face validity for students, and is relatively effective in helping students in academic jeopardy to stay in college. Further research is needed to answer questions concerning the effectiveness of this approach with different at-risk groups of students in academic jeopardy, such as undecided freshmen, transfer students, or sophomore commuters.

As an academic intervention the diagnostic and prescriptive interview requires an average of 30 minutes of professional staff time per interview. Further research should be conducted to determine if a group diagnostic and prescriptive approach would be effective in helping students in academic jeopardy, because institutionalizing an individual session model could be costly.

## References


Dukes, F., and Gaither, G. (1984). A campus cluster program: effects on persistence and academic performance. College and University, 59, 150-167.

Glennon, R. E. (1976). Intrusive college counseling. The School Counselor, 24, 48-50.

Himelstein, H. C., & Himelstein, E. Z. (1977). A pilot project: behavior contracting for community college students on academic probation. Journal of College Student Personnel, 18, 67-68.

Hudesman, J., Avramides, B., Loveday, C., Waber, A., & Wendell, A. (1983). The effects of academic contracting and semi-structured counseling sessions on GPA for students in academic difficulty. Journal of College Student Personnel, 24, 278-279.

Landward, S., & Hepworth, D. (1984). Support systems for high risk college students: findings and issues. College and University, 59, 119-128.

Letchworth, G. E., & Bleidt, P. (1983). Intrusive counseling with students placed on academic warning. Journal of College Student Personnel, 24, 456-458.

Romano, J. L., & Young, H. T. (1981). Required group counseling/ study skills for academic improvement: how effective are they? Journal of College Student Personnel, 22, 492-496.

Tata, C. Jr. (1981). The effect of an intrusive advisement

program on first-term freshman attrition. AIR Forum paper. ED 205096.

Tricomi, C., Donaruma, J., Dugan, M., & Cuevas, L. (1982). Student retention: a program designed for students on academic probation. Journal of College Student Personnel, 23, 269.

Warman, R. E. (1983). Diagnosis and prescription: improving academic performance and retention of poor achieving freshmen. SCS #83-03. Unpublished paper prepared for the Student Counseling Service, Iowa State University.